



Presentation of an Old Assyrian Document

Cécile Michel

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ANATOLIA'S PROLOGUE KULTEPE KANESH KARUM

ASSYRIANS
IN ISTANBUL



To the memory of our teacher Prof. Dr. *h.c. multi* Tahsin Özgüç



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CONTENTS

7	Forewords Hayati Yazıcı Ertuğrul Günay Mehmet Özhasseki A. Haluk Dursun Şeniz Atik Fikri Kulakoğlu	94	Exercise Tablet of a Scribe-to-be (Kt. t/k 80) Hakan Erol
20	The Discovery of Kanesh Kutlu Emre	96	Early Recognisable Hieroglyphic Signs (?) in Anatolia J. D. Hawkins
24	The Anitta Text Oya Topçuoğlu	98	Presentation of an Old Assyrian Document Cécile Michel
30	Old Assyrian Chronology and Ancient Kanesh Klaas R. Veenhof	100	Local Systems of Dating in Kültepe Tablets Salih Çeçen
40	Kültepe Kanesh Karum: The Earliest International Trade Center in Anatolia Fikri Kulakoğlu	104	The iqqâtê Documents Notarized by the High Authorities Ruba'um "The Prince" and of Rabi Simmiltim "The Chief of the Stairway" Veysel Donbaz
52	Observations on "Syrian Bottle" Shaped Imported Vessels from Kültepe Ryoichi Kontani	110	From Ore to Artefact: Metals in Kanesh Jan Gerrit Dercksen
56	The Structure of Old Assyrian Overland Trade Klaas R. Veenhof	116	Weapons of Kültepe Tayfun Yıldırım
64	The Administration of the Colonial System Mogens Trolle Larsen	124	Women of Assur and Kanesh Cécile Michel
70	The First Treaties of Ancient Anatolia Cahit Günbattı	134	Old Assyrian Law and Justice Thomas Hertel
74	The Archives from Kültepe/Kanesh Mogens Trolle Larsen	142	The Understanding of Inheritance in Ancient Anatolia According to Testaments from Kültepe İrfan Albayrak
82	Writing, Counting and Scribal Education in Assur and Kanesh Cécile Michel	148	The Glyptic Art in Kanesh Süleyman Özkan
		154	The Traces of Kültepe/Kanesh in Hittite Art Kutlu Emre
		160	A Journey Through Anatolia in 1865 BC Gorko Barjamovic
		170	Catalogue



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PRESENTATION OF AN OLD ASSYRIAN DOCUMENT

The cuneiform writing used by the Old Assyrian merchants was written with a stylus on clay. The documents were usually square or rectangular, in the form of tablets with sizes varying from 2x3 cm to 20x10 cm for the biggest ones.

The scribe had to prepare his tablet, choosing its size according to the length of the text he wanted to write. He had to write his text in one go because the clay progressively dried. The text was written in lines from left to right, parallel to the smallest size, and usually in one column. Lines were regularly ruled, and the signs were hanging on the lines. The tablet was filled up with signs and the writer followed this order: obverse, lower edge, reverse, upper edge, and even sometimes left edge. The right edge was occupied by the last of long lines, continued on the edge. Then the tablet was dried in the sun; it was not baked. However, the fire which destroyed many houses of the *kārum* at Kanesh, baked some tablets. This is why they are usually very well preserved.

Among the many cuneiform documents found at Kültepe, letters and contracts were originally enclosed inside a clay envelope. The sender rolled his personal cylinder seal on the envelope of his letter, wrote his name and the name of the recipient of the message. When the letter reached its destination, the recipient broke the envelope. On the envelope of a contract, a long abstract of the transaction was written down. Parties and witnesses left their seal imprints over it. The envelope was the guarantee of the contract's legal value. Many contracts were preserved inside their envelopes in the merchant archives.

One of the first tasks of the historian, today, is to decipher and publish the documents forgotten during several millennia. The Assyriologist draws a cuneiform copy of each side of the tablet, and takes at least six digital photographs in order to cover all the sides. The transliteration of the text provides the equivalent of each sign in the Latin alphabet.¹ Then the text is translated and commented on, both linguistically and historically. Each document is a unique piece. Even when small or broken, it contributes to our knowledge of the ancient Near East.

98

The document Kt v/k 147 was discovered in a house of the *kārum* Kanesh during the excavations conducted by T. Özgüç in 1970.² It is a marriage contract and was still preserved in its envelope.³

Transliteration

Obverse

1 <i>Ga-lu-a</i> dumu <i>A-kà-áb-ši</i>	Galua, son of A-kà-áb-ši,
2 <i>Ta-am-na-ni-kà</i> dumu-munus	married Tamnanika, daughter of
3 <i>Šu-be-lim: e-hu-uz</i>	Šū-Belum.
4 <i>Šu-ma:Ga-lu-a: e-zi-ib-ši</i>	If Galua divorces her,
5 2 <i>ma-na</i> ku-babbar	2 minas of silver
6 <i>i-ša-qal: ù šu-ma</i>	he shall pay. And if
7 <i>Ta-am-na-ni-kà</i>	Tamnanika
8 <i>te-zi-ib- šu¹</i> (Ší)	divorces him,
9 2 <i>ma-na</i> ku-babbar	2 minas of silver

Lower edge

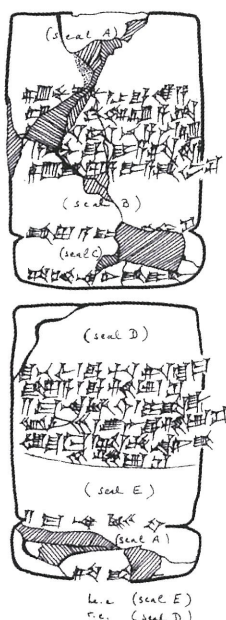
10 <i>ta-ša-qal</i>	she shall pay.
---------------------	----------------

Translation

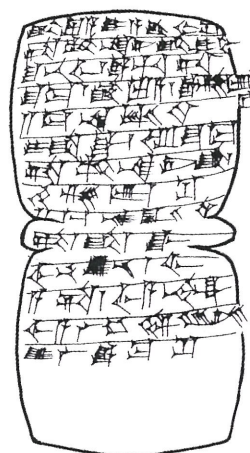
Reverse

11 <i>IGI Nu-ú-nu: igi</i>	In the presence of Nūnu, of
12 <i>A-ta: igi A-šūr-gal</i>	Ata of Ašur-rabi,
13 <i>igi A-la-hi-im lam-ni-iš</i>	of Alāhum.
14 <i>ú-lá e-pá-ši</i>	He shall not maltreat her.

(the rest of the reverse is not inscribed)



Tablet Kt v/k 147b; 4.3x4.1x1.5 cm



Tablet Kt v/k 147a:
Envelope; 5.5x5x2.6 cm.



This marriage contract contains a reciprocal clause in case of divorce, with the same penalty for both parties: 2 minas of silver (1 kg). But there is a stipulation which intends to protect the wife: the husband must not treat her badly. On line 8 of the tablet and 17 of the envelope, the scribe made a mistake typical for Anatolian writers,⁴ using the feminine pronoun suffix instead of the masculine, to refer to the husband.

Transliteration

Obverse

- 1 (seal A)
- 2 KIŠIB Nu- ú-nu D'UM'U E-ki-a
- 3 KIŠIB [A-lá]-hi-im KIŠIB A-ta
- 4 DU[MU T]ù-tù-pì-a-lá: KIŠIB
- 5 A-šur-GAL DUMU A-ta-ti-a
- 6 KIŠIB Ga-lu-a DUMU A-kà-áb-ši
- 7 (seal B)
- 8 Ga-lu-a DUMU [A-k] à-[á]b- ši

Lower edge

- 9 (seal C)
- 10 Ta-am-na-ni-kà dumu-munus

Reverse

- 11 (seal D)
- 12 Šu-be-lim : e-hu-uz : šu-ma
- 13 Ga-lu-a : e-zi-ib-ši
- 14 2 ma-na KÙ-BABABAR: i-ša-qa
- 15 lam-ni-iš : ú-lá e-zi-ib- ši
- 16 ù šu-ma : Ta-am-na-ni-kà
- 17 te-zi-ib-šu¹ (Ši)
- 18 (seal E)
- 19 2 ma-na KÙ-BABABAR

Translation

Seal of Nūnu, son of Ekia
Seal of Alahum. Seal of Ata,
son of Tutupiala. Seal of
Seal of Aššur'rabi, son of Atatia
Seal of Galua, son of Akabši.

Galua, son of Akabši.

married Tamnanika, daughter

of Šū-Bēlum. If
Galua divorces her,
he shall pay 2 minas of silver.
He shall not leave her badly.
And if Tamnanika
divorces him (!),

2 minas of silver

Upper edge

- 20 (seal A)
- 21 ta-ša-[qa] she shall pay.

Left edge

- 22 (seal E)

Right edge

- 23 (seal D)

The envelope was sealed by five persons: the four witnesses and the groom, thus, it must have been preserved in the archives of the family of the bride. Unfortunately, none of the seals being inscribed, it is almost impossible to identify the owner of each seal.

FOOTNOTES

^{*} Dr., ArScAn-HAROC, CNRS, Nanterre, France.

¹ In the transliteration:

DUMU: Sumerian

šu-ma: Akkadian (Old Assyrian dialect)

[] broken passage

┐ ┘ half broken passage

: word divider.

² The text was published by Donbaz, V., 2003, *Lamniš ulā ezebši*. "He shall not leave her in a bad situation (wickedly)", *Festschrift für Burkhard Kienast zu seinem 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, G. J. SELZ (ed.), AOAT 274, p. 47-50. Münster. It was collated in 2005.

³ For this topic, see C. Michel, "Women of Assur and Kanesh" in this volume.

⁴ See C. Michel's article entitled "Writing, Counting and Scribal Education at Assur and Kanesh", in this volume.